

## **Early Settlers and the Black Hawk War**

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The five-month Black Hawk War broke out shortly after the first settlers arrived in the Fairbury area. Most early settlers decided to go east to Indiana for a few months until the war ended. This story began with the Kickapoo tribe living about four miles south of Fairbury from 1828 to 1830. There were about 650 members of the Kickapoo tribe living in 97 wigwams with a council house.

Two important Native American foot trails met where the Kickapoo village was located south of Fairbury. The Sauk and Kickapoo trail ran southeast from Ottawa to Danville. South of Fairbury, the Kickapoo trail branched off from the main trail and ran east to Indiana.

In 1830, the Kickapoo tribe moved ten miles east to Oliver's Grove. The tribe likely moved east so the village would remain on the Kickapoo trail to Indiana.

Just as the Kickapoo moved from Fairbury to Oliver's Grove, Valentine Darnall settled south of Fairbury. The Darnall family had several interactions with the Kickapoo tribe. When they first arrived, the Kickapoo gave them some beans they had cultivated. These beans prevented the Darnall family from starving during the terrible winter of 1830-1831. The following autumn, the Kickapoo asked Darnall if they could leave their supply of maple sugar with him until the following spring. Darnall fulfilled their request and returned the maple sugar to the Kickapoo the following spring. Years later, Darnall was asked if he was tempted to eat some Kickapoo's maple sugar. Darnall admitted he was mightily tempted to eat some of the sugar but stopped cold when he discovered it was thick with dog hairs.

The story was often recited that Mrs. Darnall once asked an old Chief if he and his tribe members would kill them if an uprising should occur. The old Chief is said to have replied, "Oh yes, but we kill them quickly," meaning that they would not be tortured.

In early 1832, the Franklin Oliver family stopped for the night about three miles south of present-day Chatsworth. They were surprised to find they had chosen to camp in the middle of a Kickapoo village. Oliver did not usually smoke tobacco, but he later recounted that he made a wise decision to smoke a pipe with the Kickapoo Chief.

A short time later, in 1832, the William McDowell family arrived and settled on the South Branch of the Vermilion River about three miles north of Fairbury. The McDowells proceeded to erect their cabin at once. They brought with them a few panes of glass for a window. The boards that furnished the material for their house's door and window casing were purchased from the Kickapoo tribe and were brought from Oliver's Grove with an ox team. The Kickapoo traded the hewn wood for a small supply of

ammunition. Also in 1832, the William Popejoy family arrived and settled on Indian Creek in Avoca Township.

In April of 1832, the Black Hawk War started. This war was a conflict between the United States and Native Americans led by Black Hawk, a Sauk leader. The fighting erupted after Black Hawk and Sauks, Meskwakis (Fox), and Kickapoos crossed the Mississippi River into Illinois from Iowa. Black Hawk's motives were ambiguous, but it is believed he was hoping to reclaim land sold to the United States in the disputed 1804 Treaty of St. Louis.

U.S. officials were convinced that the Native Americans were hostile, and they mobilized a frontier militia and opened fire on a delegation from the Native Americans on May 14, 1832. Black Hawk responded by successfully attacking the militia at the Battle of Stillman's Run. He led his band to a secure location in what is now southern Wisconsin and was pursued by U.S. forces. Meanwhile, other Native Americans conducted raids against forts and colonies that had no militia to protect them.

The early settlers of the Fairbury area grew very nervous about being attacked as part of the Black Hawk War. In May of 1832, Franklin Oliver met with the Kickapoo tribe. After this meeting, Oliver had dinner at the William McDowell cabin. Oliver reported that the Kickapoo tribe had recommended that the early settlers abandon their home or erect fortifications. These early settlers only owned two rifles and had very little ammunition.

On May 27, all the white men in the settlement held a council. This council decided the best course of action was temporarily moving their families to Indiana until the war ended. On May 29, thirty-one of the early settlers loaded their seven families onto six wagons and left for Indiana.

Franklin Oliver got along very well with the Kickapoo and decided to remain in his cabin in the Kickapoo village south of Chatsworth. The Darnall and Spence families chose to stay in Mackinaw temporarily.

On the second day of the march of the 31 settlers to Indiana, a panic was created at their campsite. A couple of Native Americans had been seen on a ridge overlooking the camp, and then they disappeared into the tall grass. The women and children began to cry, and some of the men were severely frightened. They assumed the tribe members were scouts sent by Chief Black Hawk. William McDowell was not scared and, as he held his frying pan over the fire, stated that he did not propose to be scalped on an empty stomach. However, it was soon ascertained that the Indians were two friendly Kickapoos who had come to bid their white friends farewell.

According to Wikipedia, Abraham Lincoln served as a volunteer in the Illinois Militia from April 21, 1832, to July 10, 1832, during the Black Hawk War. Lincoln never saw combat during his tour but was elected captain of his first company. He was also present in the aftermath of two of the war's battles, where he helped to bury the militia dead.

The Black Hawk War ended in September of 1832 when Black Hawk surrendered. The 31 early settlers in Indiana moved back to their homes north of Fairbury. The Darnalls and Spences in Mackinaw also returned to their homes south of Fairbury. Shortly after the Black Hawk War ended, the Kickapoos were forced to leave the state of Illinois. The tribe split up and eventually settled on reservations in Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, and Mexico. Although the early settlers in the Fairbury area lived close to a village of 650 Kickapoo, no hostilities occurred between the early settlers and the Native Americans.



Black Hawk, the Sauk war chief and  
namesake of the Black Hawk War in  
1832